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GEOGRAPHIC INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

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WEST NEW GUINEA

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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Introduction

The dispute between Indonesia and The Netherlands over West New Guinea concerns one of the least-developed lands on earth -- an area of 160,000 square miles, sparsely populated by some 700,000 persons, most of whom are still in a stone-age stage of culture and probably unaware of the controversy over the territory that they inhabit. Prospects for economic improvement are extremely limited; and, in the foreseeable future, the colony will probably remain a financial drain upon its administering authority. Despite this lack of intrinsic value the governments of both Indonesia and The Netherlands, in the course of a decade of disputation over the political status of West New Guinea, have become committed almost irrevocably to positions that now involve not only national honor but also the personal prestige of the top leadership. These inflexible postures, although essentially the product of deeply rooted historical and political forces within the contending countries, are also closely related to the geographical position and unique character of the territory in dispute.

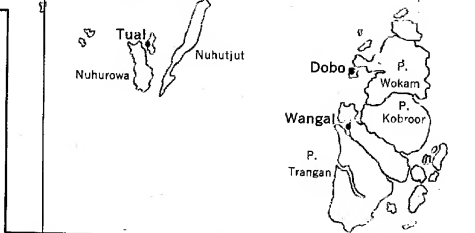
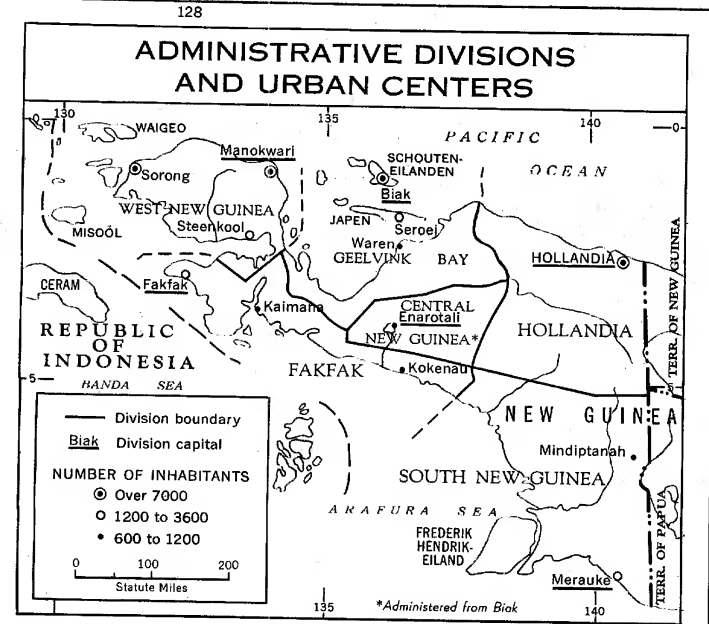
Dutch interest in the island dates back to 1660, but not until December 1949 did West New Guinea officially become a colony of The Netherlands. As Nederlands-Nieuw-Guinea, the colony is administered by a Governor who is appointed by and responsible to the Crown. Paradoxically, the 17,000 Dutch residents of West New Guinea no longer constitute a vital strategic interest for The Netherlands, and the Dutch Government has expressed a willingness to relinquish its position in the colony provided only that the inhabitants are guaranteed self-determination. The neighboring Republic of Indonesia, on the other hand, views West New Guinea as a critically strategic area. Since its inception that republic has been plagued by internal rebellion. Justifiably or not, many of these disturbances (especially in the South Moluccas) have been attributed to Dutch inspiration and material support based in West New Guinea. Consequently the Dutch presence there is regarded as a threat to Indonesian security as well as an affront to Indonesian sovereignty.

Terrain

West New Guinea consists of a broad "mainland" tapering westward into the narrow isthmus that links it with the two peninsulas of the Bomberai and the Vogelkop, which, in turn, are connected by the Bintoeni Isthmus, only 15 miles in width. The Radja Ampat Groep (island group) located off the west coast of the Vogelkop east of 129°15'E and north of Ceram, except the island of Gebe, is administered as part of West New Guinea. East of the Vogelkop are the islands of Geelvink-baai (bay), among them Noemfoor, Japen, and the Schouten-eilanden (islands), including Biak.

The dominant terrain feature of New Guinea is an extremely high mountain system that trends east-west through the center of the island and extends at lower elevations northwestward into the Vogelkop. In mainland West New Guinea, this rugged cordillera is generally 80 to 100 miles in width, with several peaks above 15,000 feet and minimum elevations of 10,000 feet maintained for a distance of more than 300 miles without interruption. This mighty barrier divides the mainland into two parts, with little overland communication between them. Trails through the highlands are few and exhausting to traverse. The deeply incised Baliem-rivier (river) pierces the mountain wall east of Wilhelmina-top (peak); and, farther west, several trails cross the highlands at 6,000-foot elevations by way of the relatively populous Wissel-meren (lakes) district.

On the south, the central mountains drop abruptly to a narrow band of lower but still rugged highlands, which, in turn, slope precipitously to the vast plain of southern New Guinea. Immediately north of the high peaks, the ranges are aligned in a series of parallel east-west ridges separated by narrow longitudinal valleys. On the north the ranges drop off sharply to the flat, swampy Meervlakte Depression. To the east and west, the ridges become lower until they merge with the low mountain arc of northern West New Guinea.



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At present the Hollandia Government is seeking to attract overseas investors to reportedly large deposits of copper, nickel, and cobalt in West New Guinea. Plans have already been advanced for the exploration of nickel and cobalt deposits in the Cyclop Mountains west of Hollandia and on Waigeo and nearby islands of the Radja Ampat Groep. Copper and other ores are doubtless to be found in abundance in the central highlands, but the cost of extraction probably would be prohibitive for any except the most precious metals. Encouragement also is being given to the exploitation of forest resources by foreign firms and to the production of cacao, rubber and other tropical crops for export.

For most Papuans of West New Guinea, traditional ways of life have been modified only slightly, if at all, by contact with Western civilization. The self-contained village unit, hostile toward outsiders and speaking a dialect unintelligible relatively few miles away, prevails over most of the territory. Agriculture is largely of the primitive shifting-cultivation type, in which small forest areas are cleared and planted to crops such as bananas, taro, and sweet potatoes for a year or two -- until the soil is exhausted -- and then abandoned. The damp tropical-forest climate also provides excellent conditions for the growth of sugarcane, tobacco, and a multitude of vegetables, the chief hazard being unexpected floods. Pigs have been domesticated in the highlands, but the lowland Papuans depend upon hunting and fishing for proteins. Limited amounts of copra are produced as a cash crop along the sandy north coast and on the offshore islands.

Current Outlook

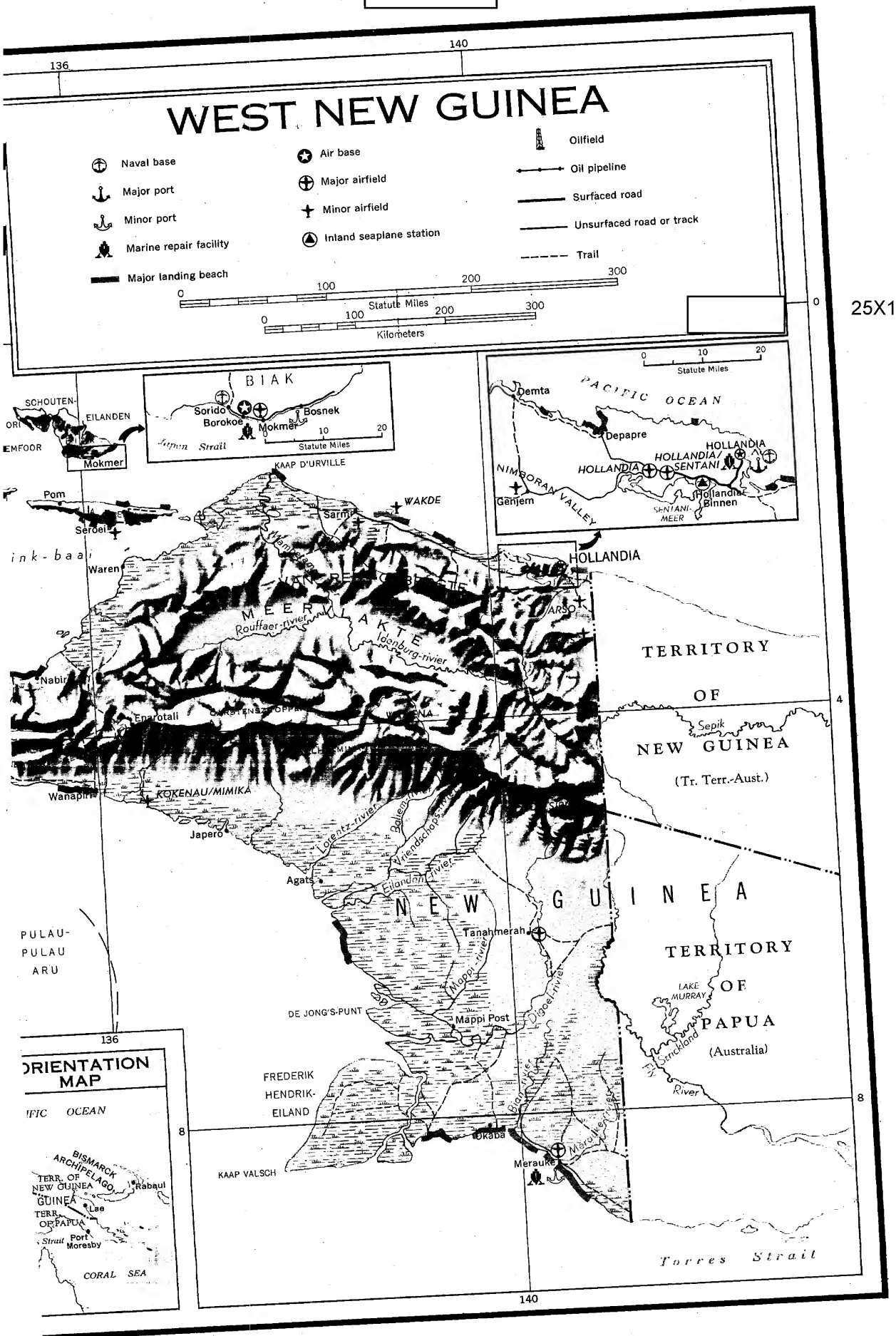
Economically and strategically, West New Guinea is not valuable to The Netherlands, but politically it has become the rallying point for forces of Dutch nationalism, as the final opportunity for The Netherlands to regain some of its former prestige as an able administrator of underdeveloped territories. The Dutch are now committed to a policy of self-government for the Papuans. The first step toward this goal was the establishment in April 1961 of a 28-member advisory council, of which 16 were elected by local inhabitants. The electorate included Europeans, Asians, and those Papuans resident in Hollandia and Manokwari. Attempts will be made to broaden the franchise and accelerate the filling of lower ranks of the civil service with qualified Papuans. In 1962, the Papuans are to be given an opportunity to choose their own political status, which is expected to be the creation of an "autonomous" state with strong ties to The Netherlands.

The Dutch program threatens to hamper the Indonesian campaign to gain sovereignty over West New Guinea. In consequence, Indonesia might undertake military or paramilitary gestures in hopes of internationalizing the dispute. Although Indonesian prospects for building a significant resistance movement among the Papuans are slight, the resident Indonesians constitute an attractive target for subversion, especially in areas currently suffering from depression in the petroleum industry. 25X6

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Population and Economy

The impact of Dutch efforts to civilize and develop the colony of West New Guinea is almost entirely limited to the periphery. The interior has been penetrated only sporadically in response to elemental needs of the few resident administrative and missionary personnel, and occasional churches and schools are the main achievements of this pioneering effort. Further opening up of the country presents difficult technical problems, and the scant resources provide very little incentive for the investment needed for equipment and surveys. To maintain even its present low rate of development, the colony is currently dependent on heavy financial support from The Netherlands.

The population of West New Guinea is estimated at 700,000 persons, including some 300,000 tribal peoples living in the so-called "exploration areas." In these areas, which cover almost all of the central highland region, the Dutch have made comparatively few contacts with the inhabitants and established no regular local governments. The rest of the people reside in "administered areas," but almost 10 percent of them live in remote districts not yet in contact with the authorities.

At least 95 percent of the inhabitants of West New Guinea are "Papuan" -- a term commonly used to include Melanesians and Negritos, as well as true Papuans. The Melanesians form local minorities along the western and northwestern coasts and around Hollandia; the Negritos live almost exclusively in the most inaccessible parts of the mountainous interior. The Papuan peoples constitute a majority everywhere except in such major towns as Hollandia, Sorong, Fakfak, Kaimana, and Merauke. In 1958, only about 16,000 Papuans were employed as wage earners in the modern sector of the economy of West New Guinea.

The non-indigenous population in 1958 included 17,181 "Europeans" (mostly Netherlands and Eurasians of Dutch citizenship) and 18,178 "Asians" (mostly Indonesians from Java, Celebes, and the nearby Moluccas but also some Chinese). The "Westernized" segment of the population can be characterized as consisting of about equal numbers of Dutch, Asians, and Papuans. The Papuans, generally occupy the lowest rung in the economic ladder. Indonesians are mostly skilled and semiskilled laborers or, in some areas, market gardeners. The Chinese comprise the small merchant class. Administrators, missionaries, teachers, technicians, and operators of the principal airlines and shipping firms are almost exclusively Dutch.

Practically all the Europeans live in five towns -- Hollandia (8,200), Biak (2,400) Manokwari (2,300), Sorong (1,800), and Merauke (600). The rest are scattered throughout the territory, a handful in each of the smaller administrative centers and ports. Indonesians in substantial numbers live in all except the most remote towns, but the greatest concentrations are in the peninsular north-west and its nearby islands. The principal oil-shipping port of Sorong, for example, includes about 5,300 Indonesians -- almost half the total population. In the eastern part of the colony the Indonesians form a much smaller proportion of the population. The population of Hollandia, for example, includes only 1,000 Asians as compared to 8,200 Europeans. The Chinese constitute important minorities in all of the principal towns.

European economic activity is directed primarily toward extractive industries, forestry, and agriculture. Oil production, the most important activity, has fallen steadily from a peak of 550,000 tons in 1954 to 245,000 tons in 1959. In 1960, the only oil company operating in West New Guinea announced its intention to give up further exploration and to confine itself to the exploitation of existing oilfields. All three remaining oilfields on the Vogelkop are expected to continue pumping as long as feasible, but this is not expected to be more than 5 or 10 years. For the Netherlands Government the decline of oil interests will bring to a standstill one of the few important modern activities in West New Guinea. This will seriously strain the already weak economy of the colony. In 1958, almost 70 percent of the total export value was contributed by crude oil shipped from Vogelkop ports. The remainder consisted of copra, nutmeg, mace, forest products, seashells, and crocodile skins.

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The triangular-shaped plain that extends southward from the central highlands to the Arafura Sea is one of the most extensive swamplands in the world. Movement through this perennially wet lowland is nearly impossible for vehicles and is difficult even on foot, but a few trails on higher ground serve to link the middle courses of major streams. In the extreme south, the relatively dry season from June through October makes possible vehicular movement over the few established roads and tracks.

Northwestern New Guinea is joined to the main section of the island by a 50-mile-wide isthmus, a much-subdued extension of the central mountains. Although slopes are fairly steep and occasional ridges may top 4,000 feet, passes at elevations lower than 2,300 feet are numerous. The main trans-isthmian route links the head of Etna-baai with the shores of Geelvink-baai, the journey requiring some 6 days. Northward through the narrow Bintoeni Isthmus, the mountains are low and forested, and the trail across the isthmus is traversable in less than a day.

The Vogelkop, north of the isthmus, consists mainly of rugged mountains, with summit elevations of over 9,000 feet and very steep slopes. Coastal swamplands in the south attain a maximum width of about 30 miles and are as difficult to cross as the more extensive lowlands of southern New Guinea. The swamps, however, are interrupted by a narrow belt of undulating tableland that usually remains dry. The only reasonably good roads of the coastal area are in the vicinity of Sorong and Steenkool; elsewhere, trails constitute the only routes of overland movement. The Bomberai Peninsula, south of Vogelkop, is unique in West New Guinea in that much of its interior is relatively level and dry most of the time. The fairly extensive grasslands of the area are not overly difficult to penetrate.

Transportation

West New Guinea has no railroads and very few roads. Roads and jeepable tracks are generally limited to the vicinity of the principal urban centers and petroleum-producing districts. Overland connections between populated areas are almost entirely by means of narrow, forest trails. Unless in constant use, such trails quickly become overgrown with vegetation and virtually impassable. Well-developed trail nets are found only in the peninsular northwest and in the Merauke region.

Inland waterways are the principal means of transportation in the undeveloped interior of the mainland. The natives rely upon flat-bottomed boats to transport the products of the neighboring forests to nearby villages, but powered craft are also used for official purposes, especially on the middle courses of the larger mainland streams. On the principal waterways, vessels with drafts of up to 12 feet can navigate upriver from the coast for about 100 miles and craft drawing 6 feet or less continue far into the interior.

By international standards, West New Guinea has no major ports, but seven ports of the territory provide limited facilities for ocean-going vessels. The most significant is Hollandia, which has an excellent natural harbor and extensive docking and marine repair facilities; it is also the principal Dutch naval base in the colony. Good port facilities are also available at Manokwari, Merauke, and Sorong; and limited facilities are at Fakfak, Babo, and Kaimana, all located on the Bomberai coast or nearby. At Sorido Lagoon on Biak Island, the Netherlands Government is constructing a naval base with extensive repair facilities.

Air transport is extremely important in West New Guinea, especially for the administrative and material needs of the small Dutch community. Mokmer Airfield on Biak is an international airport capable of handling the largest commercial jet transports, and overseas connections are also available at Hollandia/Sentani and Sorong/Jefman airfields. Scheduled DC-3 flights are handled at most large towns, and Twin Pioneer aircraft and single-engined Beavers maintain regular schedules to all administrative centers and numerous supply points. The many missionary associations of West New Guinea provide their own landing strips in the interior highlands, and new sites are constantly being developed by missionary and survey groups. Many areas unsuited for airfield development are reached by means of pontoon-equipped Beavers and Pipers, which utilize the numerous inland lakes. The larger Catalina and Grumman Mallard aircraft serve the important coastal towns.

Climate and Vegetation

Hot, humid, and rainy weather prevails over most of West New Guinea. Throughout the year, temperatures near sea level are in the lower 70's at night and in the upper 80's during the afternoon. Considerably cooler temperatures prevail in the highlands, and snow and ice are permanent at elevations of 14,000 to 15,000 feet. Rainfall is frequent and heavy, generally averaging 80 to 120 inches annually, but over 300 inches have been recorded in the high mountains. The southeast, however,

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has a pronounced dry season (June-October), when the prevailing southeast trades of the Australian winter cause the average monthly rainfall to drop below 3 inches; the annual average is slightly lower than 60 inches.

In the humid, tropical climate of West New Guinea, dense evergreen forests cover at least 85 percent of the land; grasslands cover another 10 percent; and only some 5 percent is under cultivation. Trees in the extensive areas of luxuriant broadleaf evergreen rain forest ideally form a dense canopy at 80 to 150 feet, and the forest floor is relatively open and easy to cross on foot. Where sunlight is admitted directly, as in the vicinity of streams and clearings, the canopy is less dense and an undergrowth of small trees, palms, rattans, and vines seriously hinders movement. Rain forests, characteristically an uneven mixture of clear areas and jungle, are generally found on the better drained lowlands (except in the extreme south) and on slopes up to an elevation of 5,000 feet. Between 5,000 feet and 8,000 feet, the valuable tropical hardwoods give way to a mixture of evergreen oaks and various coniferous softwoods. Although the canopy is generally dense the underbrush is heavy and virtually impenetrable, especially where timber has been cut or burned. Between 8,000 and 11,000 feet, coniferous forests predominate except on persistently cloud-shrouded slopes, where they are supplanted by forests of widely spaced small trees. In these regions, a dense undergrowth and thick layers of moss severely limit cross-country movement. Above 11,000 or 12,000 feet, forests give way to ever-diminishing amounts of scrub and grass up to the snowline at about 14,000 feet. The higher valleys in the central cordillera may also contain broad grasslands.

Widespread swamp forests are predominant in most of southern New Guinea, the Meervlakte Depression, and the coastal embayments of the peninsular northwest. Along poorly drained tidal coasts, the swamp forests are comprised of salt-tolerant mangroves, whose complex aerial roots defy penetration. Pure stands of nipa palm along the brackish inland margins of the mangrove belt are much less difficult to traverse. On coastal lowlands not subject to tidal flooding and in the land-locked Meervlakte Depression, freshwater swamp forests -- made up of trees with complex systems of buttresses and roots and with an unusually dense undergrowth -- are subject to constant freshwater flooding and are almost insurmountable obstacles to movement of any type. Locally, elevated levees along the larger rivers may provide paths through the flooded terrain.

In the sandy, better drained coastal areas of West New Guinea, principally on the north coast east of Geelvink-baai but also along most other shores backed by hilly terrain, the vegetation commonly consists of a narrow belt of scattered pine-like casuarina trees with very little underbrush. In the past, these coasts have provided suitable landing beaches for amphibious equipment. Easily cleared, they have also been used for airstrips or, more often, for extensive coconut plantations. Because of its distinctly dry "winter," southernmost West New Guinea has a scattered growth of deciduous palms and eucalyptus trees with sparse undergrowth. During the dry season, vehicular movement is possible along established tracks; but, in the wet season, much of the land is under water and is untrafficable even on foot.